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ABSTRACT

This report presents findings from Beta, one of four school districts examined in a series of case studies that investigated the complex relationship between reading assessment and instruction. The research was situated in the context of school decision making. Teachers, principals, parents, students, and central office staff were interviewed to determine how decisions were made in the district and how that decision-making process influenced assessment and instruction. In addition, teachers were observed, and discussions were conducted with them about the observations. A constant comparative method was used to identify patterns in the data. Findings showed that standardized-test data played a powerful role in Beta, with teachers, principals, and central office staff reporting that such data were the most viable way to understand how students were doing. Teachers' assessments were rarely mentioned. Within the classroom, teachers felt that they needed to "cover" the textbooks before state and district testing so that their students would score well. Teachers spent classroom time helping students prepare for the test; indeed, sometimes the curriculum for the entire year was driven by the test. Curriculum was synonymous with textbooks, and using textbooks was expected to lead to good test scores. Educators in Beta seemed to feel that the tests measured what mattered, and that therefore it was reasonable to modify curriculum and instruction to match the test. (One table and three figures of data are included; a letter to schools describing the research project, and a list of interview and observation codes are attached.) (Author/RS)

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## Center for the Study of Reading

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# CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF READING

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## Abstract

This report presents findings from Beta, one of four school districts examined in a series of case studies that investigated the complex relationship between assessment and instruction. The research was situated in the context of school decision making. Teachers, principals, parents, students, and central office staff were interviewed to determine how decisions were made in the district and how that decision-making process influenced assessment and instruction. In addition, teachers were observed and discussions were conducted with them about the observations. The interviews were taperecorded and transcribed, and field notes from the observations were elaborated. A constant comparative method was used to identify patterns in the data. Findings showed that standardized-test data played a powerful role in Beta, with teachers, principals, and central office staff reporting that such data were the most viable way to understand how students were doing. Teachers' assessments were rarely mentioned. Within the classroom, teachers felt that they needed to "cover" the textbooks before state and district testing so that their students would score well. Teachers spent classroom time helping students prepare for the test; indeed, sometimes the curriculum for the entire year was driven by the test. Curriculum was synonymous with textbooks, and using textbooks was expected to lead to good test scores. Educators in Beta seemed to feel that the tests measured what mattered. They felt, therefore, that it was reasonable to modify curriculum to match the test. Indeed, specific standardized- test data were used to modify instruction (e.g., district-wide low scores on a particular item or set of items would result in requests for teachers to emphasize that particular area more).

# ASSESSMENT AND DECISION MAKING IN BETA

The field of reading education generally seems to agree that assessment (defined as *testing*) drives instruction--that is, teachers teach to the test. A review of the literature suggests that this view of assessment is grounded, for the most part, in large-scale studies that have found that teaching practices change in response to pressures to increase student performance or to help them "do well" on standardized, norm-referenced tests (see, e.g., Herman & Dorr-Bremme, 1983; Popham et al. 1985; Salmon-Cox, 1981).

Those of us involved in this research project wondered what these findings meant in terms of particular teachers in particular classrooms in particular districts. Our wondering led us to formulate a number of specific questions: What was life like in a school that was attempting to raise its test scores? Were daily patterns of instruction in those schools different from those in schools that did not seem highly invested in raising test scores? What was the relationship between textbook orders (kind and company) to testing? Might an individual teacher feel unaffected by test pressures, yet be required to use materials that had been specifically chosen to match test items? And what about policies for passing versus retaining students? Might a teacher feel relatively free from test pressures during the year, then be told that only students with certain reading levels could pass to the next grade, a grade in which standardized tests were administered?

To address these questions, and thus to move our understanding from the abstract (research says that testing drives instruction) to the concrete (what does this mean in the lives of particular teachers/schools/districts?), we conducted case-study research in four school districts.[1]

For our research, we chose districts we thought would have different ideas about the relationship between assessment and instruction: (a) a district with a reputation for being a *low stakes* district--scores were acknowledged and then filed; (b) a *high stakes* or test-driven district; (c) a district known for its high test scores and the belief of its personnel that the consistent pattern of such scores gave them license to do pretty much whatever they wanted (although the district felt that the community would "pull in the reins" if test scores dropped); and (d) a district concerned about its test scores because of how they were perceived in the community. Personnel in this district worried that what they considered "low" test scores meant that their reading program needed to be changed. We designated these districts Alpha, Beta, Gamma, and Delta.

We chose and contacted Alpha, Beta, and Gamma, explaining our interest to central office personnel and asking if their district would be willing to participate in the study. Meanwhile, the superintendent of the fourth district, Delta, contacted us and asked to participate in the study.

In our conversations with school personnel, we explained (see letter in Appendix A) that our interest was in the relationship between standardized tests and instruction, and that we wanted to situate both tests and instruction within a broader framework of instructional decision making so that we could better understand the more subtle influences of one on the other (e.g., textbook purchasing policies). We also explained that we were interested in the seldom talked about assessment that was not test (e.g., teacher observation) and the relationship of that form of assessment to instruction. All participants, therefore, understood that we were interested in decision making as it related to assessment (both as test and not-as-test) and instruction.

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[1]The four case studies are available as Center for the Study of Reading Technical Reports.

Before the study began, and based on time and staff limitations, we decided to focus on two buildings per district, two teachers per building. The districts responded differently to our plan. In Alpha, central office staff notified all teachers that we wanted to conduct a study and asked them to contact us if they were interested. In that district, 7 teachers in one building and 2 in another participated. In Beta, central office staff decided which buildings and teachers would participate. In Gamma and Delta, central office staff invited teachers and principals to a meeting to hear about the study and then choose 2 schools from among those interested.

We used interviews and observations as our means of collecting data, interviewing key participants in all four sites: central office personnel, principals, teachers, parents, and students. The interviews with teachers were tied to our observations of their classrooms. The first interview was held prior to the first observation, and conversation-like interviews were held after each of 3 observations. The fifth interview followed the final observation. With the participants' permission, the interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed. Field notes were taken during the observations and elaborated afterward. These field notes were returned to the participants for their comments and, when appropriate, further elaboration.

The observations provided an opportunity to ground our interview questions in the concreteness of teachers' personal experiences. We could see which books they used, how they graded papers, and how they responded to students. We were then able to ask teachers about the relationship of those classroom-based decisions to the broader issues of assessment and instruction.

The data (audiotapes and elaborated field notes) were read and coded, using descriptive codes (see Appendix B). Tenuous labels emerged from the initial reading of the data. These codes were revised and refined until the codes adequately captured the content of what we had seen and heard. The codes were intended to facilitate analysis. The process of careful, descriptive coding also focused our reading of the data and helped us begin to identify patterns in the data.

After the coding was completed, one member of the research team took primary responsibility for each district. A constant comparative approach was used in the analysis. Each researcher read and reread the data, looking for and identifying patterns. Once patterns had been identified, the data were read at least one more time for evidence that might disconfirm the patterns. The researcher then presented the patterns in a case study that aptly captured what we had learned about assessment and instruction in that district.[2] Meanwhile, members of the research team continued to meet with each other, sharing possibilities and patterns. These case studies were returned to all participants for their feedback and changes, as necessary, were made in subsequent versions of the case studies.

Once we had a clear understanding of the patterns within districts, the data were read again. This time a new member of the research team, building conceptually on the analysis done in each district, reanalyzed all the data to identify patterns across districts. The data were then reread to confirm those patterns and identify salient examples, and read a final time to find negative cases, instances in which the pattern could not be confirmed. Once all patterns were confirmed, and therefore considered trustworthy, a cross-site analysis was prepared[3].

## The District in Context

Beta School District is in a midwestern city of about 59,000 people. The city contains a large university, a community college, a few manufacturers and a number of service industries. Several members of the

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[2]A fifth case study was conducted in Ohio. It is also available as a Technical Report.

[3]The cross-site analysis is also available as a Technical Report.

research team were familiar with this district and thought that Beta might offer a different perspective on the relationship between assessment and instruction than the perspective we anticipated finding in Alpha. Specifically, their experiences led them to speculate that Beta might be more "top-down" administratively, and that differences in the decision-making model might affect the relationship between assessment and instruction.

David Pearson contacted an Assistant Superintendent, Mr. Sawyer, to ask if the district would be willing to participate in the study. Mr. Sawyer seemed interested and scheduled a meeting time to talk more about the study. He invited the principals of two demographically similar schools, Beta I and Beta II, to attend that meeting (see Table 1).

**[Insert Table 1 about here.]**

Mr. Dixon and Mr. Sandstrom, principals of Beta I and Beta II, decided which teachers in their schools would participate and arranged a tentative time for the research team and the teachers to meet. The meeting between the teachers and researchers took place a few weeks later in one of the participating schools. The researchers explained the study, answered questions and scheduled the first round of observations.

Observations and interviews were conducted over a period of three months in the spring. Four teachers, two from each school, participated in the study, and a researcher was assigned to each teacher. Other researchers interviewed each principal. At the request of Mr. Sawyer, all central office administrators--Dr. Montgomery, the Superintendent; Mr. Sawyer, Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction; Ms. Warner, Assistant Superintendent of Support Services; Mr. Harris, Director of Elementary Curriculum; and Ms. Cooper, Director of Secondary Curriculum--were interviewed together.

The following fall, we began to analyze the data we had collected. Our goal was to understand literacy instruction in each classroom and to understand that instruction in the context of assessment and decision making across the district. We used the data from teacher interviews and observations to prepare instructional vignettes for each classroom to capture what was unique to each teacher. The vignettes we observed are presented here to provide a context for what we learned about decision making in Beta.

## Literacy Instruction

### *Beta I Observations*

Beta I school was built in the early 1960s and is a one-story structure with classrooms on the outside walls. The interior of the school building consists of a garden courtyard, the gymnasium/cafeteria, and the teachers' lounge. Painted murals and large bulletin boards with children's art work and papers were on the walls in the hall. In Beta I School, we observed and interviewed Ms. Holmes, a first-grade teacher, and Ms. Carter, a third-grade teacher.

#### Ms. Holmes, First Grade

Ms. Holmes' literacy instruction followed the district-selected textbook. Her instruction emphasized the skills she felt first-grade children needed to become successful readers. She also believed that reading tradebooks was important for her first graders; she read these books to the children, linked basal stories to tradebooks, and provided tradebooks for students to read independently.

On the days we observed, Ms. Holmes began her morning instruction by introducing worksheets that the children would do independently at their seats. The class was given an English textbook worksheet on the correct usage of *is* and *are*, math worksheets, a story with sentences to cut and paste into the correct sequence, and a dot-to-dot bunny coloring sheet. After these worksheets had been introduced, she told them, "When your work is done, you may read a book or write a story."

When the children were settled working independently, Ms. Holmes began to work with the three reading groups. During this time, Ms. Holmes followed a pattern similar to the basal manual lessons. She began the lesson by preparing the students for the story in their basal reader. In one reading group, she showed students the tradebook from which the basal story and lesson were taken. During another reading group, Ms. Holmes brought a tradebook that had the same poem the children were to read in the basal. She asked them to compare the pictures and to tell her other pieces that they had read by the same author. After reading the poem to the children, she asked them questions about the poem and incorporated discussions about other books she had read to them. She said she wanted the children to be aware that the basal stories and poems were available in the library, and she encouraged them to check out the tradebook that the basal series adapted for instruction. As a preparation for reading the story, she discussed the topic of the basal selection to make it familiar to the students and she introduced vocabulary that she felt they would find difficult. The vocabulary she taught was written in sentences which the children took turns reading. Ms. Holmes used this time to reinforce or teach phonics or other skills.

> In *Writing to Read* we learned *aw* says /aw/ as in *saw*. In our reading book it also tells us that *au* says /aw/.
>
> Ms. Holmes, 3/29/89

After skills and vocabulary were taught and the story was introduced, Ms. Holmes focused on reading the story. She gave the students a purpose for reading (e.g., "Read these two pages to find out where hen lays her eggs and why she lays them where she lays them."). The children read those pages silently, and Ms. Holmes asked questions about what they read.

> Ms. Holmes: What happens to the nest? What does she put there? What do we call that when eggs crack open?
>
> Martin: Chicks
>
> Lucy: Hatch
>
> Field notes, Ms. Holmes classroom, 3/29/89

This pattern was repeated until the story was completed, and then Ms. Holmes assigned basal workbook pages. She reported that if the children already knew a skill to be practiced in the workbook or if the page was too easy, she would skip those pages. She also would work with individual students to keep them current in the basal and their workbooks.

> It's based on what they've had trouble with previously. I really like keeping everyone caught up. I don't like for anyone to feel like they're behind or not good at something.
>
> Ms. Holmes, 3/30/89

Ms. Holmes used informal assessment to determine whether students needed instruction for skills not taught in the basal program. During one observation, for example, she used informal assessment

techniques to learn about a new girl in the class. She asked the girl questions concerning specific skills such as knowing the /al/ sound. Ms. Holmes told us that she felt it was important to determine skills her children did not know so she could make instructional decisions.

**Ms. Carter, Third Grade**

During our third observation of her classroom, Ms. Carter conducted a whole-class lesson on the book, *Annie and the Old One* (Miska, 1971), which had appeared as a story in a basal reader. Because she had completed the required basals for her reading groups, she chose to have the whole class read the story. The pattern of discussion observed during this lesson matched those we observed in reading groups during the first and second observations.

Ms. Carter began the lesson by going over the vocabulary. She provided the students with a worksheet of sentences she had written using the vocabulary she had decided was difficult. As she noted,

> I read the story before hand and I pick any phrases and words I think they might not understand, and we talk about them.
>
> Ms. Carter, 3/3/89

Some of the content sentences were:

1.) There was a low mesa near her own snug hogan.

2.) The tassels on the corn were turning brown.

3.) Annie sat beside a loom.

Field notes, Ms. Carter's Classroom, 5/10/89

After reading the sentences silently, the students were asked to read them aloud. For a few of the sentences, they had discussions about the word to expand their understanding.

Ms. Carter: What do they do on a loom, Sara?

Sara says that she does not remember.

Ms. Carter: Linda, can you help her out?

Linda says that you weave on the loom.

Ms. Carter: Right. And here's a picture--Annie and her mother are weaving.

Field notes, Ms. Carter Classroom, 5/10/89

She continued the preparation for reading by telling them about the Navajos and showing where they lived by pointing out states on the map. The next step was to focus their attention on the story:

> While we are reading the first part, we want to find out why Annie doesn't want her grandmother to finish weaving the rug.
>
> Field notes, Ms. Carter's Classroom, 5/10/89

Ms. Carter then read the title and asked, "What can we find out?" Various children gave suggestions, and she responded to their different answers. One child told her that they could find out who was the old one. Another child said they could find out who Annie was. The third child stated that they could find out what the problem was. Ms. Carter then gave them a purpose for reading a page such as to find out what kind of chores Annie did to help her family. After reading a page she asked questions such as "What did the grandmother tell Annie on this page? Who can find that sentence?" The reading of the story generally followed this pattern: Ms. Carter set the purpose for reading a page or two, the class read silently, Ms. Carter asked questions about the page. The following was an example of this pattern:

> Ms. Carter: Read 312 and 313 to find out what Grandma announces and why they all got to choose something.
>
> The children read silently and Ms. Carter walks around the room.
>
> Ms. Carter: Who can find the sentence that tells what Grandma announces? This time I want you to find the sentence. What important things does the old one, does the grandmother say?
>
> She called on a student who read the sentence that when the grandmother is done weaving, she will leave mother earth.
>
> Another student whispers: She's gonna die.
>
> Ms. Carter: What does that mean?
>
> The student says that the grandmother is going to die and asks: How does she know?
>
> Ms. Carter: That's what we'll find out. Now what does, go back, find the sentence that tells what the father chooses.
>
> Field notes, Ms. Carter's Classroom, 5/10/89

Ms. Carter explained that she used questions about the basal stories to determine whether a student was ready for the next reader or a higher reading group. She also used questions to determine comprehension of the stories. She reported that she looked for understanding of the main idea. With difficult stories she had the students read page by page, checking on comprehension for each page.

After reading the story page by page and answering Ms. Carter's questions, the students summarized the first part of the story.

> Ms. Carter: Now, what is the problem in the story? What happens? What is kind of sad?
>
> She called on a child who said that the grandmother was going to die, and that Annie didn't want her to.

Ms. Carter: When does the Grandmother say she is going to die, Margaret?

Margaret: When she finishes the rug.

Ms. Carter: Okay. In the second part we are going to find out what Annie learns.

Field notes, Ms. Carter Classroom, 5/10/89

The children finished reading the first part of the story and were given a worksheet with questions very much like those Ms. Carter had asked during the guided reading. The assignment was to write out answers to those questions. Some of those were:

1. How is living on an Indian reservation different from living in a city. How is your life different from Annie's?
2. What chores did Anne do to help her family? What chores do you do?
3. Why do you think Annie wanted her mother to stop working on the rug?

Field notes, Ms. Carter Classroom, 5/10/89

As the children wrote answers, Ms. Carter walked around the room checking how the students were doing. Our observation ended when it was time for the students to go to music.

**Beta II School Observations**

Beta II School was built in the later 1950s and is also a one-story building with self-contained classrooms. In the entryway of the school were two large murals drawn by children. A wall in the main hallway had the names of every child in the school and rows of stars behind the names. This chart was part of a school-wide system of public recognition for attendance and good behavior. Framed pictures made by the children hung in the hallways, and bulletin boards crowded with children's writing and art work marked the entry to each classroom. In the classrooms, the school-wide rules for classroom behavior were displayed prominently on bulletin boards. Ms. Eaton, a second-grade teacher, and Ms. Boyd, a third-grade teacher, participated in the Beta II study.

**Ms. Eaton, Second Grade**

Ms. Eaton had previously taught in an out-of-state school district that used a literature-based program for reading instruction. When she took the job at Beta II, Ms. Eaton was aware that she would have to use the direct instruction approach to reading adopted by the school. While Ms. Eaton did use the materials and did follow the school's reading approach, she felt limited by it. Therefore, she supplemented that program with a variety of integrated language arts activities, including a writing component, that she felt were important for her students. These supplementary activities fit her personal philosophy.

> Part of my day, the decision has pretty much been made for me. The other part of my day, I feel, it's my philosophical obligation to do what I feel is best for the children, within a certain framework provided by the district. I mean I have a second-grade curriculum guide that tells me the units I should be teaching. . . . How I accomplish these objectives is my decision and challenge.
>
> Ms. Eaton, 3/9/89

In our second observation, Ms. Eaton began the morning by going over the activities the children would do that day. These activities were listed on the chalkboard:

House page
Crossword puzzle (on animal homes)
Bunny page
Jellybean Math Worksheet (color/count)
Bunny basket

Field notes, Ms. Eaton's Classroom, 3/15/89

Ms. Eaton offered some suggestions to help children choose which activity to do when. They were given the freedom to decide when and how to complete the four activities, but they were expected to complete all four by the end of the day.

After going over the activities for the day, Ms. Eaton was ready to begin instruction. She used this transition time as an opportunity to prepare them for the next activity.

> Ms. Eaton: Everybody put away your markers and scissors. I'm going to be thinking--markers and scissors are frozen on your desk tops--I'm going to be thinking about something that has two legs, a top like a rectangle, it opens and closes, and you can think of it as a **house** for books. Lily?
>
> Lily: A desk
>
> Ms. Eaton: I'm thinking about an object that could be a *house* for something. I'm thinking of something that is also a rectangle, something that has 24 crayons, or 64 crayons. . . . Lily?
>
> Lily: A crayon box

Field notes, Ms. Eaton Classroom, 3/15/89

When the children were settled, she told them she was going to read the book, *A House is a House for Me* by Mary Ann Hoberman (1978). She showed the book and thumbed through it making comments about the illustrations. She then read the book, asking questions and making brief comments as she read. When she read about beds as a home for bedbugs, the students commented:

> Joe: I never had one
>
> Mike: They're there though, you just can't always see 'em!
>
> Ms. Eaton: Let's think of more houses.

Field notes, Ms. Eaton's Classroom, 3/15/89

She continued to read and the children chimed in on the phrase "but a house is a house for me." When she finished reading, she asked the children for their own ideas. She pointed to the poster behind her which read: "A _____ is a house for a _____ but a house is a house for me." The children gave many ideas for the blanks and she wrote them all down. Some of them were as follows:

> Brad: A cat is a home for a mouse.
>
> Ms. Eaton looked puzzled.

Mallory: Yeah, if he swallowed it!

Ms. Eaton: Yes, if a cat swallowed the mouse, it would be a house for it.

Susie: A brain is a house for ideas.

Ms. Eaton: Good thinking, Susie.

John: A head is a house for your brain.

Ms. Eaton: A head is a house for your brain, or you could use the word skull instead of head.

Field notes, Ms. Eaton's Classroom, 3/15/89

Although she made this suggestion, she wrote down the words John gave her. She consistently used the language that the children used.

After she had written down many ideas on the poster, she handed out dittos with the same sentences (with blank spaces) as on the poster. These dittos were then made into a class book. The children had the option to make their own book.

Henry: Sky is a house for clouds. Ear is home for earwax. An ear is a home for a earring, unless you put it in your nose.

Ms. Eaton: Good ideas, Henry.

She added Henry's ideas to her list.

Ms. Eaton: Eyes up here, look at the ideas we have. Now I want you to save the rest of your ideas. You can write them on this page. [She held up the ditto.] If you have more than one idea you may put them in one of these books.

Field notes, Ms. Eaton's Classroom, 3/15/89

**Ms. Boyd, Third Grade**

Ms. Boyd's classroom was bright and colorful. Fish made of newspapers hung from the ceilings, plants were placed throughout the room, and posters of animals and plants hung on the walls. Posters also hung on the doors of the closets: Classroom Helpers, Citizen of the Week, School Rules, Classroom Rules, Playground Rules, Luncheon Rules, Substance Abuse, and Steps for Creative Writing.

All third-grade students had been tested with a reading series (Distar) placement test and then divided into six groups.

That is the nice thing about the direct instruction. It is not all of this guessing game about, "what do I do with the children, where do I place them." It's not a guessing game.

Ms. Boyd, 3/15/89

Ms. Boyd taught two of these reading groups, and the other third-grade teachers taught the other four reading groups. She used the Distar reading series in each group for 45 minutes every day. She also

noted that each lesson in the series took two days to teach. On the first day she taught the vocabulary and guided the students through an initial reading of the story. On the second day the students reread the story, completed a related workbook page and, if there was time, worked on their independent writing.

During two of our observations, Ms. Boyd passed out worksheets to the whole class before meeting with the reading groups. As the children read aloud the words listed on one worksheet, Ms. Boyd used the technique of clapping once to indicate when the children should say the next word.

> Students: Cow. Mexico. Happy.
>
> Ms. Boyd: You forgot a word.
>
> Students: Canada.
>
> Ms. Boyd: Let's start again.
>
> She claps and the students begin with the first word.
>
> Ms. Boyd: Next.
>
> She claps and the students repeat the list of words.
>
> Field notes, Ms. Boyd's Classroom, 3/10/89

During one of the reading group sessions, the children were reading about a fly named Herman who flew to different countries. Ms. Boyd followed the manual and the techniques of the series. The following excerpt illustrates how Ms. Boyd conducted her reading group when following the direct instruction manual.

> Ryan read from the reading book and hesitated.
>
> Ms. Boyd: The word is *and*. What's the word?
>
> Ryan: And
>
> Ryan continued to read, then Julie read aloud softly.
>
> Ms. Boyd: The word is *come*. What's the word?
>
> Julie: Come back
>
> Ms. Boyd: All right. Start again from the beginning.
>
> Julie read from the beginning.
>
> Ms. Boyd: Everybody, spell the word. The word is *flies*.
>
> The students spelled the word as Ms. Boyd snapped her fingers for each letter. Then George read.
>
> Ms. Boyd: What kinds of things do flies do?

George: Eat food.

Ryan: They like yellow things.

Colleen: Buzz around.

The children continued to read the story aloud.

Field notes, Ms. Boyd's Classroom, 3/10/89

After reading the story and answering questions about the story, Ms. Boyd deviated from using the manual and began a discussion comparing *Charlotte's Web* (White, 1952) to the story they read.

Ms. Boyd: How was *Charlotte's Web* like the story?

Henry: When they both died at the end.

Ms. Boyd: Does a fly look exactly like its mother?

Sally: Yes.

Ms. Boyd: Does a fly grow?

Andy: No, but on the inside it grows.

Ms. Boyd: Let's compare Charlotte and Herman.

Jake: They. . .

Ms. Boyd: Raise your hand when you're ready. George, compare them.

George: They're both insects. Wait. . .

Ms. Boyd: Julie?

Julie: They both have babies, but Charlotte is a spider, but Herman is a fly.

Field notes, Ms. Boyd's Classroom, 3/10/89

The children were excited, raised their hands eagerly and actively participated. When asked about the discussion in the interview, Ms. Boyd replied:

> That was not written in the plan. Some of these things just come from the top of my head. And I find that that's the way a lot of things go. It's that moment that is just right. This is the opportune time. I have to watch the time. I hate to get too involved. Now, that was exciting to the children. I hate to do that in the middle of something, because it's hard for them to get back on task again. Because they're off thinking about these things.

Ms. Boyd, 3/15/89

All four of the Beta teachers had reported that while they used mandated materials, *how* they taught the curriculum was their prerogative. Our observations supported their statements. We next integrated our understanding of literacy instruction at the classroom level with the information we had obtained from district administrators, principals, and students in order to determine how decisions were made in the district. As a result, we came to understand how these individuals viewed Beta's organizational structure, curricular decision making, and approach to and use of assessment.

## Organizational Structure

We had originally hypothesized that the district operated within a top-down decision-making model. However, some of the information we gathered from both the observations and interviews suggested the possibility of a bottom-up model. Three areas were of particular interest:

1. At Beta II, there was a strong commitment to decisions teachers had made collaboratively with a former principal.

2. Teachers, principals, and administrators discussed "site-based management" approaches to decision making.

3. Mechanisms, such as the district's Teacher Advisory Committee and the Building Advisory Committees, provided a means for teacher input.

In our analysis we took a closer look at these three areas to determine their consistency with our original hypothesis. In this section, we discuss the evidence we found for both the top-down and the bottom-up decision-making models, and discuss the model that we believe fits the decision-making process in Beta.

## Evidence for Top-Down Model

The comments of most of the participants and the behavior of two of the teachers strongly supported a top-down model. Discussions of teachers' input into curricular decisions confirmed the model and helped us to determine the flow of communication and the degree of control and influence exercised by different participants.

### Comments Made During Interviews

When discussing decision making in the district, teachers, principals, and administrators explicitly and repeatedly stated that the central administration exercised ultimate executive control. When asked about curricular decisions, Mr. Sawyer, an assistant superintendent, explained:

> What you would see is the administrative hierarchy as far as organization. . . . Then you just feed the committees underneath. . . .
>
> Mr. Sawyer, 4/3/89

Mr. Dixon was quite straightforward in his view of administrative control:

> Right now I think it's a kind of top-down process, with the superintendent being pretty much in charge. I've always felt a lot of leeway to make some decisions. With the current administration that's been curtailed some. . . .
>
> Mr. Dixon, 3/8/89

Ms. Carter's views are typical of the teachers interviewed:

> A lot of teachers feel as if they aren't giv[en] enough input. It sounds as if they are, but a lot of teachers feel that they give the input but the administrators make the decision.
>
> Ms. Carter, 3/3/89

Choice of words and phrases within the interviews also helped to confirm our hypothesis of a top-down decision-making model. Teachers and principals often used words such as *allowed* and *supposed to*. This implied that the decisions they referred to were made by others, not by the individual teachers. For example, when asked about the role of the curriculum guide, Ms. Carter stated:

> We are supposed to follow it and everyone does the best they can. For example, we are supposed to teach so many units.
>
> Ms. Carter, 3/3/89

While Ms. Boyd discussed the prospect of becoming an Accelerated School, she talked about the district allowing Beta II to deviate from the curriculum.

> We have been chosen now as an Accelerated School. The district has allowed us to do some things that they may not allow another school to do. In other words we can deviate from the curriculum.
>
> Ms. Boyd, 3/15/89

Another telling piece of linguistic evidence was the frequent distinction between "we" and "they" in discussing decision making. The use of "they" when referring to those who made final decisions as opposed to "we" made it difficult to determine specifically who held the responsibility for decision making in Beta. However, the "they" so frequently referred to seemed to be the central office administrators, headed by the Superintendent. For example, Mr. Dixon reported that he would implement his own decisions until someone told him not to.

> I never ask anybody if I can do something. I've done this long enough that I've learned if you ask somebody and they tell you, then you've got to do it. If you just do it, you're going to be able to do what you want to do for a long time before they even know what you're doing, if it isn't what they want.
>
> Mr. Dixon, 3/8/89

## Behaviors in Interviews

In a few instances, teacher behavior revealed an uneasiness with the interview process. For example, one teacher covered the tape recorder during the interview. The interviewer had asked if teachers could use only one of the two district-adopted textbooks with the whole class. When the teacher replied that she didn't "quite get that feeling," the researcher asked where she got those feelings. She laughed, covered the tape recorder, and responded. Another teacher asked to have the tape recorder turned off for the interview and expressed concern about notes being taken during the observation. Later, when the researcher asked this teacher how she became involved in the research project, she replied that the principal asked her to participate in the project, and added that given a choice, she probably would not have volunteered.

Interestingly, teacher remarks made during these interviews did not seem controversial, inflammatory, or even critical of the administration. Yet teachers were clearly uncomfortable with the project. Two explanations seem equally plausible. First, they may have been uncomfortable with university-based observers in their classrooms. Second, they may have resented the process by which they were "volunteered" for the project. These behaviors suggested that the teachers were not integrally involved in the decision-making process. Had the teachers been more involved in the decision, they could have freely chosen whether to participate; in that situation, they might have been less concerned about their remarks.

## Teacher Input

In many of the interviews, people talked about administrators actively seeking teacher input, curriculum committees making curricular decisions, and administrators making final decisions. To determine the relationship between teacher input and the final administrative decisions, we examined the teachers' role in the curricular decisions. We learned that teachers provided input for district-wide curricular decisions (such as the selection of a new textbook series) and that teachers' feedback did not necessarily influence the curricular decisions.

Two separate examples illustrate this relationship. In the first situation, kindergarten and first-grade teachers were upset when the district unilaterally decided to put *Writing to Read* labs in every elementary school. This was a district-wide decision that provided structured instruction of reading and writing for all kindergarten and first-grade students in the district. Mr. Dixon described the decision process in this way:

> That did not go through the reading committee. There was no real discussion on anybody's part outside of the Super[intendent] and the Assistant Super[intendent] and I think maybe the Directors of Elementary Curriculum. . . . And the general feeling in the staff was that they didn't like that they arrived without having anything to do with it. The curriculum committee had nothing to do with it.
>
> Mr. Dixon, 3/8/89

Mr. Dixon added that after teachers saw the positive effects on students who had received a year's experience in the lab, they accepted the *Writing to Read* labs. The situation, he thought, demonstrated the open-mindedness of the teachers. He also noted that some teachers in the district had not yet accepted the labs.

A second example centered on the purchase of science "tubs." Apparently, years ago, the district purchased science tubs which were stocked with equipment and manipulatives needed for hands-on science instruction. They were circulated around the district. However, materials needed for instruction were often missing from the tubs. At other times the tubs did not arrive on schedule. If they arrived the very day the teacher needed the tub, teachers would not have time to replace missing materials. Teachers, therefore, voted to adopt science textbooks in place of the science tubs, and the administration gave the tubs to another district. Last year, surveys were sent to the teachers for input on the science curriculum. The teachers asked for manipulatives that would supplement their science textbooks. Then "somebody" at the district level decided that the old science tubs would be used in the classroom.

> Well they say that's what the teachers wanted. . .but that's not what we wanted. Now the way they are trying to pacify people, they are saying that they won't take our science books away. We can still use the science books but that we are going to use the tubs to teach three units.
>
> Ms. Carter, 3/3/89

At grade-level meetings, some teachers expressed frustrations with these decisions.

> Our grade level was kind of calm. Third-grade teachers seem to accept things whether we agree or not. We just kind of flow. All we worry about is the testing. But the other teachers said their grade-level meetings were almost like shouting matches. All they did was talk about the tubs.
>
> Ms. Carter, 3/3/89

Although teachers believed that decisions for a *Writing to Read* lab and for science tubs were made without--or in spite of--teacher input, the principals believed that teachers had input into curricular decisions. Mr. Dixon, principal of Beta I, joined Ms. Carter in her first interview. During this interview he stated that he "personally [thought] that teachers [had] a lot of opportunity" for input into curriculum. Indeed, Mr. Sandstrom, the principal from Beta II, believed that teachers had more input than principals in the curriculum.

> I would suggest that the principals feel that the teachers are heard far more than we are by the central office. We feel a lot of times disenfranchised from the decision-making process. We are informed as an aside.
>
> Mr. Sandstrom, 3/16/89

> There are lots of different levels of [instructional decision making]. That's a very complex thing in this district, because there is a lot of teacher input into how the decisions are made.
>
> Mr. Sandstrom, 3/16/89

Although administrators and principals believed that teachers had input in curricular decisions, these two examples of curricular decisions in Beta suggest that while teachers might offer input into "centralized" decision making, they have few officially sanctioned opportunities to make their own curricular decisions at the classroom level. Teachers seemed to "teach behind closed doors" when implementing instruction and materials that might deviate from the district materials. As Mr. Sandstrom explained:

> Obviously what happens 99% of the time is that teachers do what they want until caught or whatever. Which is standard operational procedure all over the country.
>
> Mr. Sandstrom, 3/16/89

## Evidence for Bottom-Up Model

### Past School-Based Decisions in Beta II

During the interviews, teachers and administrators frequently discussed decisions the Beta II staff had made about eight years ago. Beta II had had special problems that needed to be addressed (e.g., low test scores, poor attendance, and behavior problems), and the former principal led the teachers in a rather lengthy set of deliberations to determine how to change the situation. A school-wide star chart with every child's name was placed prominently in the main hallway to acknowledge publicly individual progress. Rules for behavior were posted in each classroom. Programs were developed to increase the interest and involvement of parents in their children's school achievement. The staff decided upon a direct instruction reading and math series as a means of increasing students' standardized test scores. The former principal, Ms. Gillette, had asked for and received from the central administration permission to deviate from the district adopted textbooks by using these direct instruction materials.

In our interviews, we sensed a high regard and affection for Ms. Gillette. Indeed, an Excellence in Education sign outside the school had been dedicated to her. However, teachers emphasized that Ms. Gillette's approach to school problems was unique within the district. They noted that while decisions had been made at the school, the teachers and the principal did not have the freedom to implement their decisions without the approval of the administration and board. Rather than evidence for a bottom-up organizational structure, the decisions made at Beta II became evidence for how exceptions were handled within a top-down structure.

### School-Based Management

As we began the cycle of the interviews and observations, district-wide school-based management was in the planning stage. Beta administrators and principals were discussing and negotiating what restructuring might mean in Beta. Beta I and Beta II had been selected by the district as the only two Beta schools which would participate in the initial restructuring efforts.

Beta I school had applied to become part of this school-based management program. Teachers and the principal talked of it as a possibility for implementation the following fall, pending confirmation of funding. When discussing this possibility, the principal contrasted it with the current top-down decision-making model:

> Right now, I think it's a kind of top-down process, with the superintendent being pretty much in charge. I've always felt a lot of leeway to make some decisions. With the current administration that's been curtailed some, yet I find them promoting us to be part of the restructuring activity. I think there's a little bit of conflict there, and perhaps the decision-making process will be closer to the school and where the action is as we move through this process than I think it is now. . . . [Indeed] we may be beyond that [top-down decision-making] now, particularly since they're suggesting, people in the central office, that we become involved with restructuring.
>
> Mr. Dixon, 3/8/89

Beta I currently had a Building Advisory Committee--a committee of teachers who advised Mr. Dixon. In the interviews, teachers at Beta I acknowledged that while they currently were involved through this committee, there would be major changes in the decision-making structure if the school became involved in the restructuring project. For example, at the time of the data collection, teachers at Beta I were allowed to make some budget decisions (e.g., teachers were given a discretionary budget of $100 for materials). The restructuring process could potentially give teachers freedom to make major budgetary

decisions, decisions they believed were not permitted in other schools in the district. One teacher expressed uncertainty as to how much control the teachers would actually have:

> It's asking a lot, and I'm sure we won't be given all the freedom that we're seeking. (She added, "And it's probably best we're not.")
>
> Ms. Holmes, 3/7/89

School-based management was also discussed by Beta II teachers. In the Beta II interviews, they talked of the "restructuring process of decision-making" and of "accelerated schools." Central office administrators had nominated Beta II to become an accelerated school. According to the principal of Beta II, the school had been "designated [as] an accelerated school for at-risk kids." As an accelerated school, the principal and teachers would be allowed to make decisions normally reserved for the central office, to deviate from the district curriculum, and to develop programs and curriculum especially for the students in their school. The principal would lead the teachers in decision making. Mr. Sandstrom was unsure how this shared decision making would work.

> [The central office] wondered if I would be willing to accept the restructuring process of decision making. Whether I can handle and monitor it so it doesn't get out of hand. . . . It's somewhat of a difficult framework to lead because we are so used to being told what we're to do. So we are still struggling with what that means, particularly at this moment, with how far does that go.
>
> Now if we are accepted as an Accelerated School we're supposed to have more latitude but I don't know that I necessarily sense that latitude yet.
>
> Mr. Sandstrom, 3/16/89

When asked if, as part of an accelerated school, he still would have to get approval for everything from the central office, he replied: "We're still negotiating what that's going to involve."

The restructuring process in the early formative stage seemed to affect the way people talked about decision making and may have been responsible for some conflicts and inconsistencies noted in the interviews. According to Ms. Eaton, teachers were aware that the administration was "trying to include teachers in the decision-making process." In reference to instructional decisions in the classroom, Ms. Boyd observed,

> I think the district is good at treating us as if we know what we're doing. In other words, they don't make the ultimate decision.
>
> Ms. Boyd, 3/15/89

However, in the first interview, she had made this statement:

> Teachers serve on these committees and then we make the decisions. We think we make the decisions. Then, people in charge make the ultimate decisions on a lot of things.
>
> Ms. Boyd, 3/8/89

By viewing these quotes within the context their recent entry into the network of accelerated schools, perhaps Ms. Boyd's contradictory remarks can be viewed as simply reflecting the initial stage of the restructuring process. Teachers were aware that shared decision making was likely to become a reality,

however, they also understood that the decision-making control was with the administration, even the decision to share control with teachers. Principals and administrators were in the process of determining what role the teachers would have in decision making. In reference to the restructuring project, an Assistant Superintendent stated:

> That speaks to teachers making more of these local decisions. We're not sure what those local decisions are, but it should be more than the purchase of toilet paper.
>
> Mr. Sawyer, 4/3/89

Mr. Sandstrom, the Beta II principal, seemed to agree as he noted it was "hard to get a staff who is used to autocratic ruling used to shared decision making." He added:

> I found that this staff is naive about their responsibilities and about how they could make decisions and what they had to say was important over and above whether or not there is toilet paper in the bathroom.
>
> I've always recognized the expertise that teachers have, but these teachers are just not used to having to make these decisions. They are not really good at or sophisticated at making global kinds of decisions. It's hard for them.
>
> Mr. Sandstrom, 3/16/89

Principals seemed to be uncertain about their role in a restructured school: How much latitude would be allowed them? How were they to monitor the process so "it doesn't get out of hand?" How could a school-based decision-making process be imposed on a district whose members were accustomed to others making those decisions?

## Mechanisms in Place for Bottom-Up Model

In spite of their persistent view of Beta as a top-down district, principals and administrators noted that teachers in Beta were given more opportunities for input than they might have in other districts.

> Now if you were to go to another district and take this process we have on the road, there will be some districts that say, "Your staff has an awful lot of input."
>
> Mr. Sawyer, 4/3/89

Frequently they referred to committees as the place where teachers participated in those decisions.

> I would say that our teachers are used to being involved in making decisions. They see K-12 [committees] as giving them that opportunity. Now we do have teachers who want to make more decisions closer to classroom.
>
> Mr. Sawyer, 4/3/89

Mr. Sandstrom noted that more teachers were involved in the decision-making process in this district than in other districts. When asked what he attributed that to, he replied:

> I would attribute it to the central office not wanting to dictatorially impose their decisions. . . . It's been fluctuating according to the degree to which the central office wants to decentralize decision making. It happens now that the central office is

> aggressively seeking teacher input. . .but the ultimate power lies with the administration and the school board.
>
> Mr. Sandstrom, 3/16/89

Commenting on the prospect of change associated with testing the Accelerated Schools model in Beta I and Beta II, Mr. Sawyer stated: "So I think we're searching for the next step with regard to decision making."

The structure of committees in the district was consistent with a bottom-up decision-making model. Each school in the district had a Building Advisory Committee (BAC). The committee consisted of at least one teacher from each grade level and was chaired by the building principal. A teacher representative from each BAC served on the district Teacher Advisory Committee (TAC). The TAC met with the superintendent once a month to communicate concerns to the superintendent. Mr. Sandstrom saw the possibility that curricular issues could be discussed more in the TAC when the restructuring process was underway. However, it was emphasized by an assistant superintendent that the BAC and the TAC were "advisory in nature":

> With regard to budget, maybe some staffing situations, staff development, staff-teacher ratios, those kind of things should be discussed within those BACs. That is what we always agree upon, advisory in nature.
>
> Mr. Sawyer, 4/3/89

The BAC and the TAC seemed to be committees where the concerns of teachers could be aired, but were not vehicles for decision making. They provided the means for communication with the administration and a forum for teachers to discuss issues.

## Discussion

While the decisions made at Beta I, the talk about school-based management, and the committee structure appeared to point to a bottom-up decision-making model, closer analysis revealed that they did, in fact, support our original hypothesis of a top-down model. The decisions made at Beta I were exceptions allowed by the central administration, school-based management was to be monitored so it "doesn't get out of hand," and committees acted in an advisory capacity only. Figure 1 illustrates the top-down organizational structure of Beta.

**[Insert Figure 1 about here.]**

## Curricular Decision Making

Within this top-down administrative structure, decisions about curriculum became decisions about materials. Teachers provided input into curricular decisions by completing needs assessments for each subject area up for textbook adoption and by serving on the curriculum committees. The needs assessment forms provided a means for teachers to evaluate the current curriculum and materials. Before filling out the form, teachers examined portions of the district's curriculum, the state learning objectives, and appropriate documents such as the Standards of the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics. Based on that information, teachers made suggestions about what should be added or deleted at their grade level. They rated the degree to which the operationalized curriculum actually met its objectives. The second part of the Needs Assessment contained questions that permitted teachers to identify materials they wanted to use and to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the present

materials and program. The needs assessments were then given to the appropriate curriculum committee.

The curriculum committees mentioned in the interviews were reading, language arts, math, science, social studies, health, and substance abuse. The committees were comprised of teachers who, as a group, represented all grade levels and all buildings. The administration assigned the grade level to be represented by each building on the committees and the principals communicated to the teachers what committees needed teachers. Teachers then would either volunteer or be asked by the principal to serve on these committees. Some principals also served on these committees. Mr. Sawyer, an assistant superintendent, chaired some of the curriculum committees and as Dr. Montgomery, the Superintendent, noted:

> His directors chair the remainder. They all flow through his vision in the schools.
>
> Dr. Montgomery, 4/3/89

This 20 or more member group formed a district-wide committee that determined the district-wide curriculum and materials.

The curriculum committees determined the objectives for each grade level and decided on textbooks for district-wide use. The textbook adoption process operated on a six-year cycle. In the first year of the cycle, the curriculum committee decided on three or four sets of materials for piloting. During the second year of the curriculum adoption cycle, teachers were selected to pilot the materials and to provide the committee with monthly feedback on "how that curriculum works." If there were any "gaps," then supplemental materials would be found. The next four years of the cycle were for monitoring and assessing the district's curriculum materials.

When describing the committee's role in the adoption process, Ms. Warner, an Assistant Superintendent, observed:

> In the initial [committee] meeting we set the agenda for the year. As we are in the process of looking at materials in the language arts, we need to set up what we expect to have for the next year.
>
> Ms. Warner, 4/3/89

Then, when she was asked about goal setting, she responded:

> We view the objectives. Teachers will do a needs assessment, evaluation of current curriculum. In light of the learning assessment plans they would look at the objectives and look at our current material in the curriculum.
>
> Ms. Warner, 4/3/89

Ms. Boyd expressed the role of the teachers on the committee in the final curricular decision in this way:

> Teachers serve on these committees, and then we make the decision. We think we make the decision. Then, people in charge of the curriculum make the ultimate decision on a lot of things.

> The committee decides on the materials or the length of time that we'll be teaching it. The committees buy and decide what series we will use.
>
> Ms. Boyd, 3/8/89

Through this process, the district had adopted two reading series for district-wide use. Except for the teachers in Beta II, teachers were expected to use these two reading series. Teachers at Beta II were expected to use the reading series approved by the district for their school. One administrator stated it this way:

> We are restricted in eight of our schools to [two reading series]. . . . You can select between them. . . . At Beta II we are restricted to [a basal series] and [a direct instruction approach].
>
> Mr. Sawyer, 4/3/89

Teachers also talked about this expectation.

> There are two series chosen; and we are told that we have a dual basal system. You get the feeling that you are expected to use both. . .both with the class, not with every child. You use one or the other.
>
> Ms. Holmes, 3/7/89

> I have certain books I have to use.
>
> Ms. Eaton, 3/9/89

How they used them and what would be emphasized were determined by the individual teachers.

Administrators believed that by adopting two reading series, teachers had the flexibility they needed to provide appropriate reading instruction. One series was to be used with more skilled readers and the second series with the other children. However, some teachers seemed to feel a need for additional options.

Ms. Eaton had moved from a district that used a literature based reading program to Beta II, with its direct instruction reading program. She saw that the Beta school reading series was so structured that it affected her instructional decisions. After explaining that her philosophy of reading differed from the direct instruction reading program, she described the inflexibility of the series:

> That reading group time is very structured and it is set. The decisions are made. The script is there and it is so structured.

Later she stated:

> I think it's important, when you are analyzing my decisions, that you know where I'm coming from.
>
> Ms. Eaton, 3/9/89

Although she used the direct instruction reading series, she also added to her program the elements of reading and writing that she viewed as important. She used the low scores of district-wide standardized tests to support her decisions.

Beta's process for curricular decision making is summarized in Figure 2.

**[Insert Figure 2 about here.]**

## District-Wide Assessment

### Assessment-as-Tests

The administrators, principals, and teachers who participated in this study seemed to define "assessment" as tests selected for district-wide use. One teacher, for example, when asked how she assessed students in the broad sense, replied:

> The biggest thing would be tests. The test is the big thing.
>
> Ms. Boyd, 3/15/89

The test score data from published tests (e.g., the SRA and the state reading and math assessments) were reported to the public in the state mandated School Report Card as a means of holding districts, schools, and teachers accountable for student performance. Teachers modified their instruction based on the outcomes of these tests and were concerned about covering the material that was on the tests.

Mastery of the district objectives was tested each spring. Teachers reported that students in grades one through five were given the SRA test, and the third grade was also given the state reading and math tests. One teacher mentioned giving a group IQ test. Additionally, district tests were developed to cover the objectives not covered by the standardized test and state tests. One such test was a writing sample assessment teachers were required to give for all grade levels.

The district did not require teachers to use the textbook's published unit and chapter tests, although many teachers did choose to use them. In Beta II, the teachers used the tests from the direct instruction reading series after every 20 lessons. The teachers in Beta I were "given the opportunity" to use the published tests from the two district-selected reading series. Teachers in both schools reported using the reading series tests at the beginning of the school year to help determine ability groups.

The educators we talked to in Beta seemed to believe that tests covered what was important for children to learn. Administrators and principals seemed to view published tests as a means to obtain objective information that would help them evaluate the quality of instructional programs the children were receiving. Mr. Sandstrom expressed the value of published tests in this way:

> It's less intuitive and more objective. . . . There is more objective data. Along with this, there is the teacher's opinion, which is valuable. For example she might recognize that a child did poorly on the test because he or she was having a bad day. . . . The danger in abandoning the formalized measure is that often I hear teacher's assessments of students and they are incorrect.
>
> Mr. Sandstrom, 3/16/89

Most often test scores were questioned if the teacher observed the child having a "bad day." Administrators and principals mentioned teacher observations of students' test-taking behavior rather than of students' learning and classroom performance. It was felt that teachers could shed more light on how the students took the test rather than providing additional information about the student's ability based on her observations or other informal assessments. Published tests provided the objective information administrators needed for the State Report Card.

Principals were required to compile the test scores for their buildings and to send them to the district administration. The administrators used the tests scores to inform them of the progress the students, as a group, were making within each school building and district-wide.

Standardized achievement tests and state tests also provided indices that could be reported to the public. Mr. Dixon summarized the relationship of assessment and accountability in this way:

> It occurs to me that since we started doing that [sending the state report card to every family] teachers are more concerned about what the test results are, because those test results now go into everybody's home. I know we pay much more attention to them; and I know that in some things in the curriculum we are more careful about getting them taught because we know they are going to be evaluated. In fact, we are very careful now, since we went to the spring testing, to see that everything that's on the test that's normally in the grade-level curriculum is taught before the test is administered.
>
> Mr. Dixon, 3/8/89

Teachers were concerned about the reporting of test data, as expressed by Ms. Carter:

> Well, we do worry. The results get published and we want the school to look good.
>
> Ms. Carter, 5/10/89

Another teacher expressed concern about the public's interpretation of these standardized test scores.

> I think [testing] drives the whole system more than it should. . .because test scores are published in the paper by school, and it's right there. I guess that it goes along with the feeling that the school must be accountable and that parents need to know, but I guess that I feel tests can be misinterpreted, too.
>
> Ms. Eaton, 3/9/89

These data suggest that, in Beta, the standardized test results in the State Report Cards was viewed as a means for holding teachers accountable for implementing the district curriculum: Teachers were expected to cover what the students would need to know for the tests. Teachers expressed concern about the effect of such accountability. Ms. Eaton saw that assessment, used for accountability to teach a district curriculum, affected the individual reading instruction she could provide:

> [A]nd now we're back toward assessment and accountability and district wide objectives in reading rather than an individualized program.
>
> Ms. Eaton, 3/9/89

She believed that, as one was held accountable to district-wide objectives through formal assessments, the reading program became less individualized. Movement toward the structured formal assessment diminished possibilities for individualized reading programs. To cover the material before spring testing, teachers felt that needs of individual students were not met. Ms. Carter stated it this way:

> There was just so much to cover before the test. We don't think it's right that the kids get tested on what they haven't been taught, and so we try to cover everything before the test. It's really a push. Kids get left behind. Now [after testing is over] we can go back and take the time and help the kids that got left behind.
>
> Ms. Carter, 5/10/89

## The Influence of Assessment-as-Tests on Instruction

Use of tests directly affected instructional decisions in the district. First, teachers used instructional time to prepare students for tests. During one observation, for example, Ms. Carter was preparing her third graders for the district writing assessment. On the board was written the following writing prompt:

> Your principal has said that wearing shorts to school will not be allowed because some students wear them when it's too cold, some wear raggedy cutoffs, and it gives students the attitude that they come to school to play instead of to learn. Agree or disagree. Explain.
>
> Field notes, Ms. Carter's Classroom, 4/28/89

After students wrote their opinions, Ms. Carter checked their work. She would say things such as "good reasons, good ideas, okay good now give me another reason, reread this. . .these aren't all complete sentences, okay good, now you need a closing sentence." She explained that because of the test she worked on writing all year and wanted the children to learn to write using a topic sentence, three or four sentences and then a closing sentence.

A second way tests affected instructional decision making is that test scores were used to inform teachers, principals, and administrators of instructional areas needing modification.

> [The] principal would talk to us if scores were low. . .other than that, we look to see if we could have served them better if we had changed something. . .make modifications in our plans for teaching. . .to improve their deficits.
>
> Ms. Carter, 3/3/89

Indeed, teachers changed their instruction if standardized test scores for a group of students were low in a specific area. As Mr. Dixon explained:

> [The unit leaders and I] look at the [test results] together and see what the strengths and weaknesses are and point that out, and then teachers use that to help themselves develop directions to try to meet those things.
>
> I would say to [a] teacher, "Take a look at what you're doing with nouns and pronouns and recognize that that's an area your kids didn't do as well in, and you might want to spend a little more time or effort or even rethink. . .what you are doing."
>
> Mr. Dixon, 3/8/89

Another example of modifying classroom instruction on the basis of tests scores was provided by Ms. Cooper, Director of Secondary Curriculum:

> We found that our students scored very low in antonyms, and what we've decided as a department was that our goal is going to be that we'd emphasize the instruction of antonyms for our kids.

The next spring the student scores were up. She reported:

> [It was a] positive reinforcement to the teachers because they thought, "Oh those five minutes I spent on antonyms paid off." It's not like they went through any major lesson plan changes, but they just did some modification of instruction.
>
> Ms. Cooper, 4/3/89

Ms. Eaton felt that focusing on comprehension was an important part of reading. She reported:

> [SRA test scores] indicate that our children need more work with comprehension, higher-order thinking skills, predicting.
>
> Ms. Eaton, 3/9/89

She used this information to justify augmenting her direct instruction program with more writing and comprehension instruction.

> Our test scores support my rationale and beliefs as to what needs to be added to the program.
>
> Ms. Eaton, 3/9/89

Spring testing also seemed to influence Ms. Holmes' instructional decisions. She felt an urgency to make sure the students learned what they needed to know to take the test. To get the students ready for the SRA tests, it was necessary to disregard the sequence of the textbook. However, the textbook was structured to provide reinforcement of previously taught concepts. Because of this structure, she found it difficult to skip around in the math book to cover the concepts that would be tested in the spring. Her decisions of what pages to use were influenced by what was on the spring tests.

> I'm at the point now where I want to do as much as I can, let them learn as much as they can before the test.
>
> Since I've seen the test, I've done my long-range planning differently. I would like to expose them to all areas of math. For example rather than waiting until we get to telling time, when we get to that chapter, also our math book is such you can't really skip around. It does a check up at the end of each chapter on the previous chapters which I think is good for the review.
>
> Ms. Holmes, 3/30/89

Tests seemed to be used to identify those instructional areas teachers could modify for students as a group rather than for an individual student.

The third way testing influenced decisions was through its impact on curriculum/materials, as the following remarks illustrated:

> Ms. Eaton: "I think they are really trying to move towards a new math program for example."

Interviewer: "What is driving this change?"

Ms. Eaton: National assessment in math, the National Council of Teachers in Math, their new proposals, these are the requirements that we would like to see in math. . . . We're supposed to fill out the math [needs assessment] based upon the new recommendations.

Ms. Eaton, 3/9/89

When another teacher was asked how tests affected teachers,.she responded:

Well, materials. We adapt materials to fit the test. Like the state test says, there is more than one right answer. Well, it may not be right, but we teach that there is just one answer, so now we have to change the materials to fit the format.

Later she stated:

Tests will change texts and then the teaching would match the test.

Ms. Carter, 5/10/89

## Informal Assessment

Administrators, principals, and teachers all seemed to equate assessment with tests, but to have differing perceptions of what constituted "informal" assessment. The administration seemed to consider informal assessment as the nonstandardized textbook tests given by teachers. For example, when asked about informal assessment, Ms. Warner replied:

I think most of what you see is that, since you have to give some kind of progress report after six weeks, that there is some type of assessment, be it a unit test or a chapter test or something.

Ms. Warner, 4/3/89

Principals and teachers considered informal assessment as unit and chapter tests as well as part of day-to-day decisions associated with instruction and materials. Teachers, for example, referred to the questions they asked children as informal assessment. How the children responded to the questions helped teachers determine if the students understood the skills and/or concepts in the materials. Teachers in Beta II emphasized that reading assessment occurred daily because it was structured into the direct instruction program.

With direct instruction, it's really a constant assessment. It's ongoing. It's day after day after day. And that's how these kids never fail.

Ms. Boyd, Teacher, 3/15/89

Ms. Eaton had an especially broad view of informal assessment. For her, "informal" assessment included the reading series tests, questions for checking comprehension, writing samples, and knowing the children and what "they are capable of doing and how to get them to reach their maximum potential." For this teacher, informal assessment depended on the teacher's perceptions and observations of individual students; and she used them to monitor the development of each child's learning.

During their interviews, three of the four teachers discussed some type of informal assessment. These informal assessments--observations, samples, checklists, narratives, and notes--were closely tied to mastery of materials and/or test preparation.

Of the three teachers who discussed informal assessment, two used informal techniques for placing the students into ability groups, checking skill progress, and monitoring worksheet accuracy. There was some evidence that teachers might skip a workbook page if they knew that students understood that skill.

> Informal notes; if I find a child is having trouble, I'll write it down. I have seven LD children and if they are having trouble with the story or with a certain part of the story or with a skill, I'll tell the LD teacher that day.
>
> Ms. Carter, 3/3/89

For these two teachers, informal assessment provided information about how the students were progressing within the curriculum materials.

An example of informal assessment as a placement tool was given by Ms. Holmes, a first-grade teacher. She used the screening results, kindergarten teacher's comments, and her own observations and informal assessments to determine reading groups. She would ask students to identify colors, letters, numerals, color and number words, and some vocabulary words. She observed what they would do when encountering unknown words--did they try to sound the word out or just read on? She required students to complete activities in a readiness book to determine "who can sit there, go left to right, [and] follow along with me." She assessed the children to see if they could identify which picture did not belong in a row. Ms. Holmes observed students to determine "who can stay with me, who picks up on things easily, who's going to need more repetition, [and] more help." If this initial assessment was not "fine enough" for a particular student, she would then give the basal series placement test, which helped her make some decisions. Ms. Holmes used several pieces of "assessment data" to determine groups: what other teachers said about a student, her own informal assessment, and possibly a published test. Informal and formal assessments were used for placing students into reading ability groups by determining what skills students had and at which pace they could go through the material.

Ms. Eaton used informal assessment to monitor the development of the students' writing. She kept a writing folder for each child, made notes about the children's writing, in a notebook, and held conferences with the children about their writing. She used informal assessment to monitor individual students' progress. She accomplished this by knowing each child and what "they [were] capable of doing and how to get them to reach their maximum potential."

Teachers talked a great deal about such informal assessment. Indeed, comments about samples, checklists, and dynamic and other forms of informal assessment accounted for 43% of all teacher talk about assessment (see Figure 3). Teachers also reported relying on informal assessments to make a number of decisions at the classroom level (see Figure 4). Assessment-as-test and district-mandated materials (which teachers discussed the other 57% of the time) often provided the criteria for such informal assessments. For example, teachers informally determined if a student got the questions right on end-of-chapter tests or basal worksheets or if their reading and writing skills were consistent with what would be measured on district, state, or national tests. In this way, responsibility for determining "what matters" instructionally seemed to lie outside the classroom--with state mandates, tests, and textbooks. Teachers made decisions within the parameters established by these outside sources.

**[Insert Figures 3 and 4 about here.]**

## Conclusion

As we were in the process of analyzing our information from Beta, we found ourselves searching for an overriding metaphor to explain how the district operated. Members of the research team suggested a variety of possibilities: a factory, a traditional school, an old style business management model, and the military. Various aspects of Beta could be described using these seemingly different "pictures," yet each of them shared with Beta these similar themes or aspects:

- The power resided at the top of the structure.
- Those at the bottom of the power structure were implementors of decisions.
- Decisions reflected the attempt to ensure continuity throughout the system.
- Indices of the system's success were based upon group performance.

Additionally, we found that decision making in Beta seemed to be driven by accountability to the public. Inherent in this was the belief that standardized tests provided an objective, efficient, and appropriate means of evaluating educational programs. Beta had accepted that accountability was inevitable. Objective measurements were valued by administrators and principals, and teachers felt that they were held accountable for their student's performance on these tests. In addition, teachers were to implement instruction that would provide students with the tools to enable them to do well on the tests.

In many ways, Beta typified what we commonly consider to be "school." The physical, organizational, and instructional aspects of Beta were similar to many of the schools with which the researchers were familiar as students, teachers, and researchers. Traditional roles were assumed by members of Beta: teachers taught; each principal was responsible for coordinating the activities that represented school in his building; and the administration made final decisions before taking them to the board for approval. District-wide curriculum and assessment were used to ensure quality education. It was our sense that much of what was said of Beta would typify many schools.

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**Table 1**

**Demographic Data for Beta**

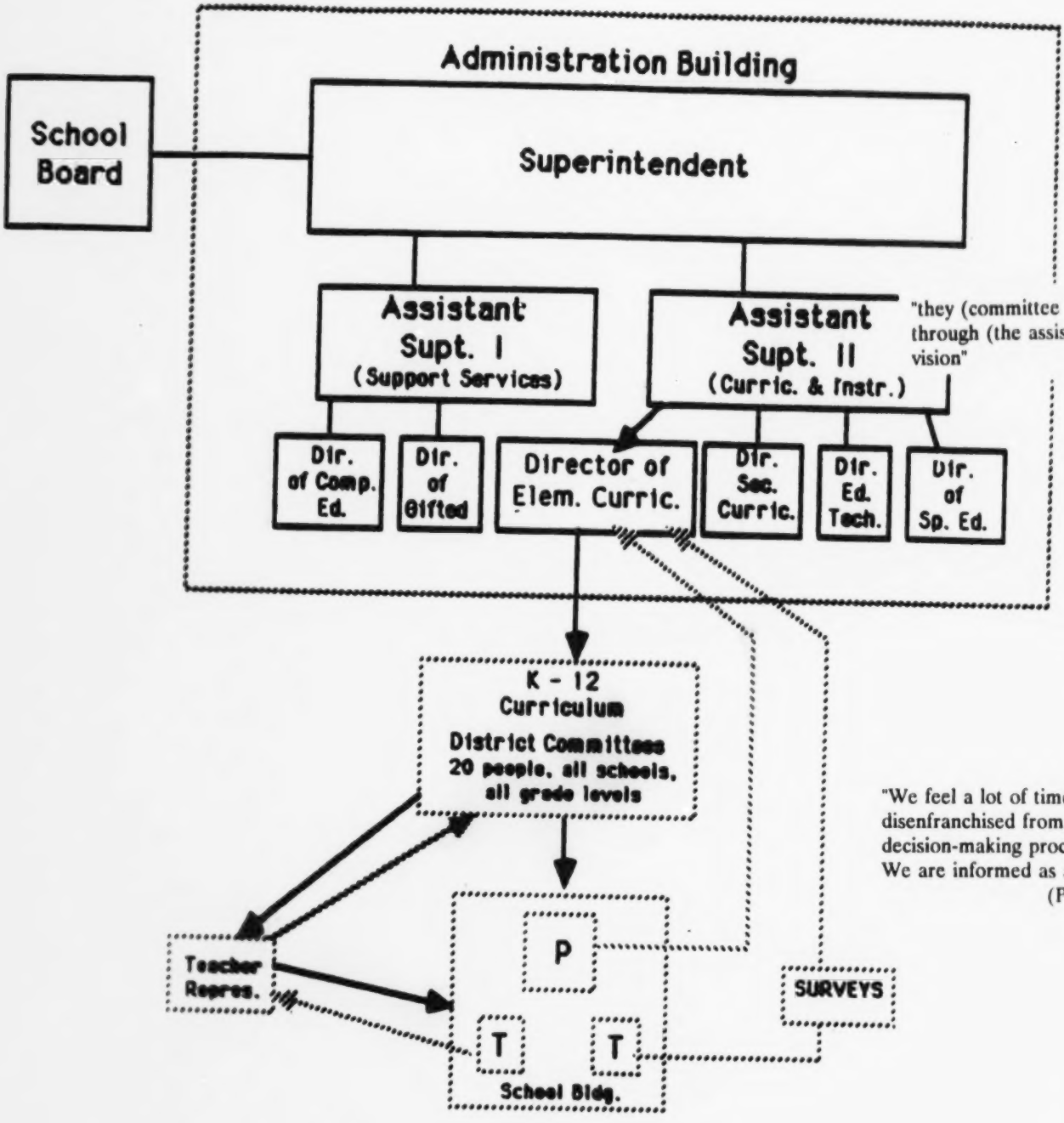
| | Total Enrollment K-5 | Average Class Size | % White | % Black | % Hispanic | % Asian | % Native American | % Low Income | Student Mobility Rate | % Not Promoted |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Beta I | 456 | 22 | 65.6 | 30.7 | 0.7 | 3.1 | 0.0 | 31.1 | 29.2% | 3.1 |
| Beta II | 473 | 23 | 60.9 | 35.9 | 0.4 | 2.7 | 0.0 | 33 | 39.7% | 1.1 |
| District Average | | 22 | 65.7 | 30.5 | 8.5 | 2.4 | 0.1 | 23.2 | 26.2% | 1.8 |

Source: 1988 State Report Card

Figure 1

"What you would see is the administrative hierarchy as far as organization...then you just feed the committees underneath." (Admin.)

# ORGANIZATIONAL MODEL OF BETA




"they (committee issues) flo through (the assist. super II vision"

"We feel a lot of times disenfranchised from the decision-making process. We are informed as an aside. (Prin.)

"A lot of teachers feel as if they aren't giving enough input. It sounds as if they are, but a lot of teachers feel that they give the input but the administrators make the decisions." (Teacher)

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Figure 2

# CURRICULUM DECISION - MAKING PROCESS

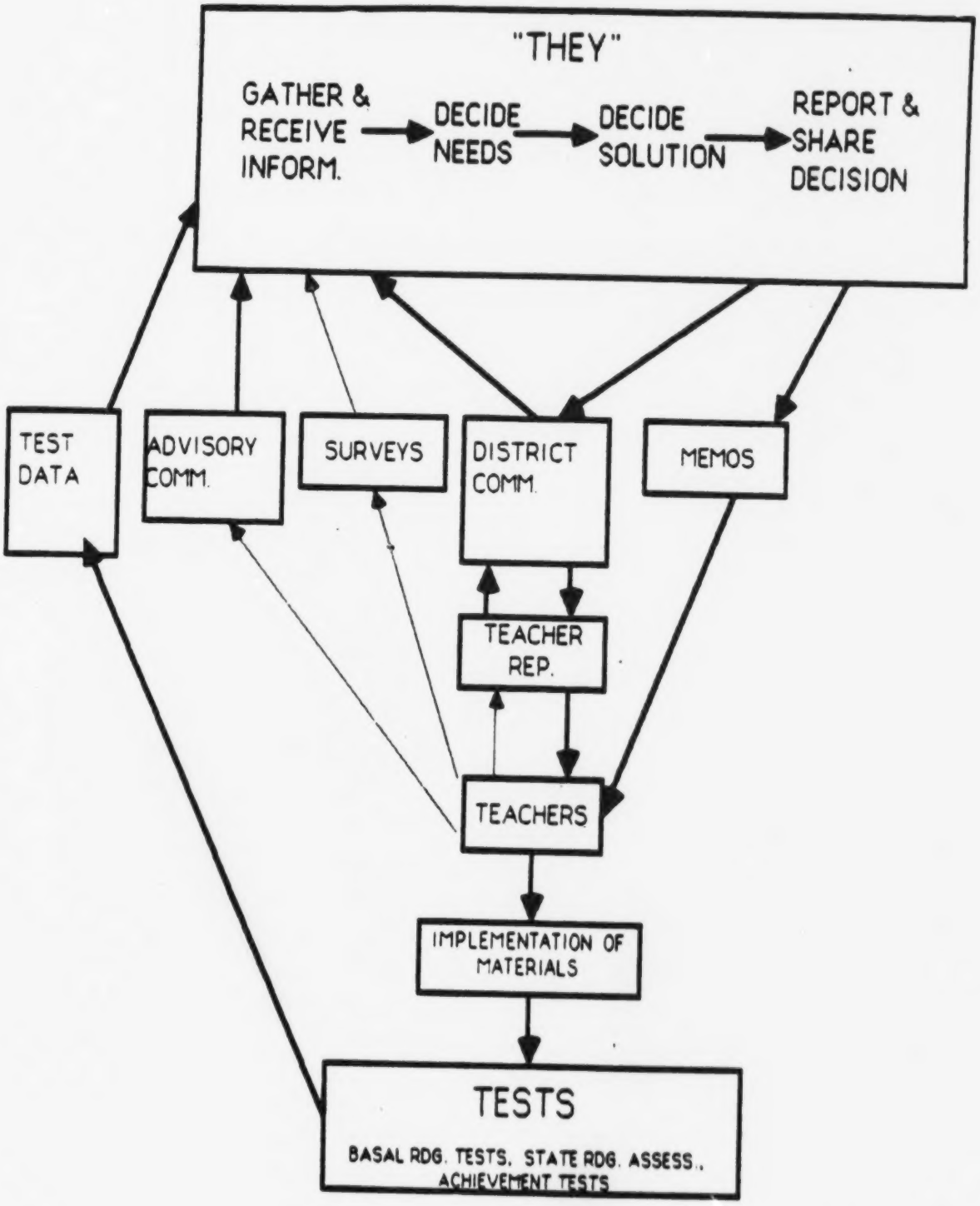
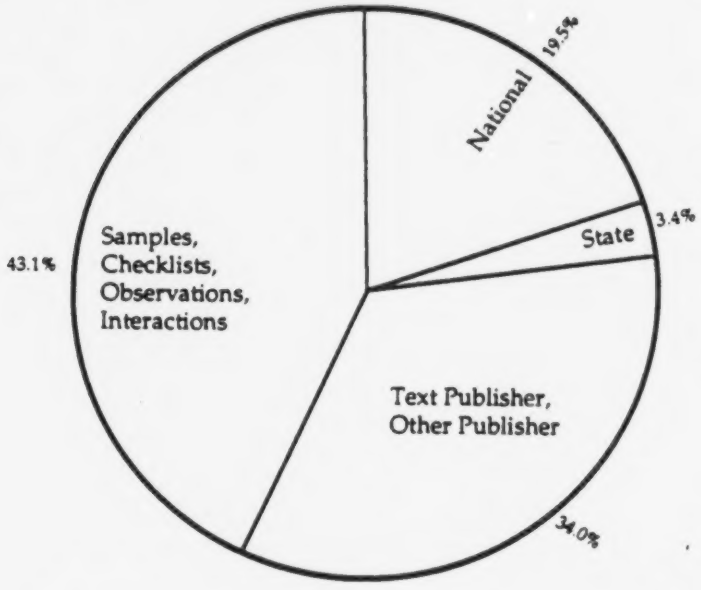
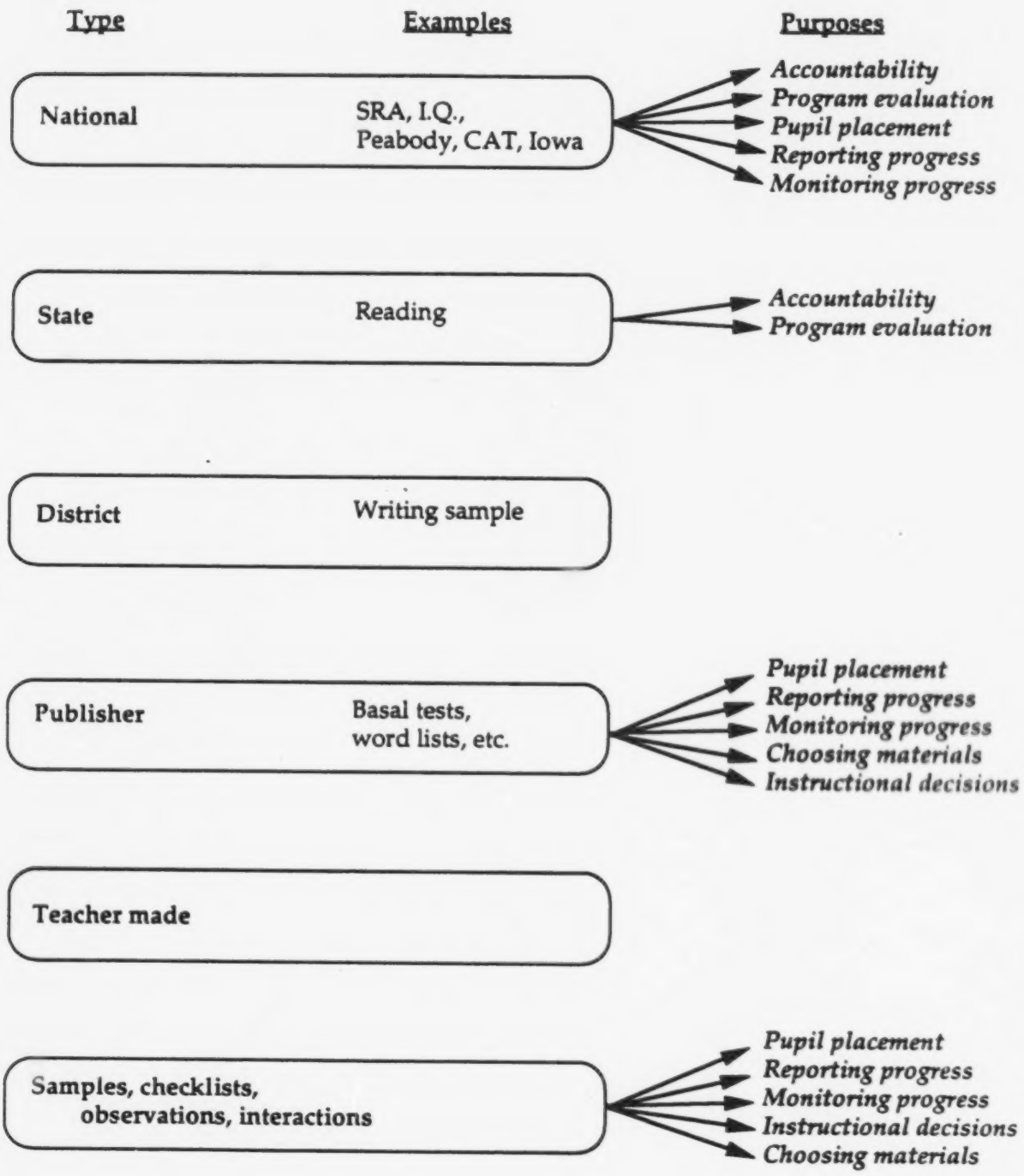


**Figure 3. BETA**
**Approximate amounts of teacher talk, by type of assessment (in lines)**




| | | % of Talk |
|---|---|---|
| National | 149 lines | 19.5% |
| State | 26 lines | 3.4% |
| District | 0 lines | 0.0% |
| Text Publisher, Other Publisher | 260 lines | 34.0% |
| Teacher Made | 0 lines | 0.0% |
| Samples, Checklists, Observations, Interactions | 330 lines | 43.1% |

Figure 4. Uses of Assessment: Teachers' Perspectives



# Appendix A

University of Illinois
at Urbana-Champaign

**Center for the Study of Reading**

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# An announcement about a proposed research project at the Center for the Study of Reading at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

A group of us at the Center for the Study of Reading have recently been involved in research on assessment. In addition to our work with the state-wide assessment here in Illinois, we have also been studying the role of reading assessment in schools nationally; for example, we have recently completed an extensive national survey to try to better understand the relationship between reading assessment and instruction in our nation's schools.

As a follow up to that broad survey, we are interested in trying to understand the same assessment-instruction relationship from a much more "contextualized" perspective--by working with teachers, administrators, students, parents, and policy-makers to understand how that relationship works in "their" school(s). So we are designing a national study, with four to six districts in Illinois and a like number from outside the state. In each district we would like to select two schools and four classrooms (two per school) to work with more intensively.

We would talk with administrators, school board members, parents, teachers, students and support personnel in order to understand decision making from a variety of perspectives. In addition, we'd like to spend a goodly part of each of 4-8 school days, over the next four months, observing two teachers in each school. We want to understand the kinds of decisions they make on a daily basis and how they use a variety of formal and informal assessment practices to make those decisions. So we would not only observe but also talk with them about those observations.

We see this research as an opportunity for us to better understand classroom practice and teacher decision-making, particularly from the perspective of the data teachers use and how they use it to make those decisions. We see this as an opportunity for the teachers, schools, and districts who get involved to better understand their own practices in the context of how other teachers, schools, and districts approach these same issues. Our intent is to create an environment in which everyone involved has something to learn and benefit from. We would like our cooperating teachers and other school personnel to participate as fully as they would like--perhaps meeting with us to discuss findings and, if they so desire, to work with us as we seek to share findings and insights with a broader audience.

For those who will participate only in an interview, the time commitment is modest, perhaps an hour per person at the outside. For the two teachers per school with whom we work, it is a different story. We realize that 4-8 days of being observed and talking with observers is time-consuming and puts additional demands on professionals whose time is already highly taxed. We realize too that the invitation to become learners in a cooperative venture may seem more attractive to us than to busy professionals. We are hoping, though, that some teachers will see this as an opportunity and work with us to eliminate the research/practice division that so often hinders communication between university and public school educators. Frankly, we do not think we can ever really understand the assessment-instruction link without seeing it happen in classrooms and then having the opportunity to reflect on decisions we observed with the teachers who made them.

In exchange for this help, we can offer these incentives:

- Each participating school will receive a narrative report of decision-making/assessment practices in their school.
- Each participating school and district will receive a copy of our synthesis of the 8-12 sites with whom we work.
- We will hold working sessions so that educators from both the university and the public school can work together to understand and share the implications of our case studies.
- We will also secure tuition and fee for participating teachers.
- The principal investigator is willing to volunteer to work with any school or district level curriculum or assessment planning committees to the degree that they would like his involvement.

This is an exciting time to be involved in education. We think this assessment research offers an opportunity for school and university to work together and to make a difference in the lives of teachers, researchers and children.

We hope you will accept our invitation to become involved.

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# Appendix B

Interview Codes

Slot 1
Talking About

a. Self
b. Superintendent
c. Assistant Super.
d. Board Member
e. Staff Devl. (person)
f. Consultant
g. Principal
h. Teacher
i. Student
j. Parent
k. State
l. District
m. Administration
n. Staff Dev. (program)
o. Decision Making
p. Curriculum
q. Instruction
r. Assessment
s. Discipline
t. Materials
u. Classroom
v. School
w. Committees
x. Town
y PTA
aa. Asst. Principle
ab. Social Worker
ac. Education
ad. Budget
af. Salesman

Slot 2
Type

21 Philosophy
22 Policy
23 Practice

Slot 3
Source

301 Mandate
302 Board of Ed.
303 Superintendent
304 Principal
305 Colleague
306 Staff Development
307 Book
308 Teacher Education
309 Personal Experience
310 Experience as a student
311 Teaching Experience
312 Intuition
313 Can't Identify
314 State
315 Professional Meeting
316 Reflection
317 Source
318 Asst. Super.

Slot 4
Control

401 Self
402 Cooperative
403 Committee
404 Teacher
405 Principal
406 School
407 District
408 State
409 Student
410 Aide
411 Superintendent
412 Asst. Super.
413 PTA
414 Union
415 Ad
416 Board
417 Parent

Slot 5
Participation

51 Mandatory
52 Voluntary

Slot 6
Types of Assess.

601 National
602 State
603 District
604 Text Publisher
605 Other Publisher
606 Teacher Made
607 Samples
608 Checklist
609 Informal
610 Dynamic

Slot 7
Uses/Role of Assess.

701 Accountability
702 Program Evaluation
703 Teacher Evaluation
704 Pupil Placement
705 Reporting Pupil Progress
706 Monitor Pupil Progress
707 Choosing Materials
708 Instructional Decisions
709 Diagnosis

Observation Codes

Slot 1
Task Definition

1 Assessment
2 Behavior Management
3 Classroom Acitivty
4 Planning/ Schedule
5 Non-Academic

Slot 2
Grouping

201 Whole/T
202 Small/T
203 Indiv/T
204 Whole/NoT
205 Small/NoT
306 Indiv/NoT

Slot 3
Content

301 Social Studies
302 Science
303 Math
304 Literature
305 Reading
306 Writing
307 Grammar
308 Spelling
309 Phonics
310 Vocabulary
311 Music
312 P.E.
313 Drama
314 Art
315 Other
316 Health

Slot 4
Materials

400 None
401 Text
402 Basal
403 Trade Book
404 Workbook/sheet
405 Blank Paper
406 Kit
407 Manipulative
408 Computer
409 Tape Recorder
410 Other Gadgets
411 Art Supplies
412 Chalkboard
413 Homemade Book
414 Reference Material
415 Test
416 Other
417 Film/Movie

Slot 5
Type of Activity

(Use only with Slot 1 #3)
501 Telling
502 TI/SR
503 Scaffold
504 Discussion

Slot 6
Type of Assessment

(Use only with Slot 1 #1)
601 National
602 State
603 District
604 Txt Publisher
605 Other Publisher
606 Teacher made
607 Samples
608 Checklist
609 Informal
610 Dynamic